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SUBJECT: SREEPUR, BANGLADESH: READY TO VOTE

SUMMARY
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1. (U) Preparations for the upcoming municipal elections in the Sreepur sub district of Bangladesh are on track. NGOs and local election officials report few hitches in the run up to the August 4 poll for mayor and councilors. Political parties are also confident that the process will proceed smoothly, focusing on the issues rather than party affiliation. Nearly 1.4 million Bangladeshis will go to the polls nationwide in the first test of elections under the Caretaker Government.

THE MOOD IN SREEPUR
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2. (SBU) Sreepur sub district, located in the district of Gazipur, 1.5 hours northeast of Dhaka is home to over 92,000 residents and nearly 50,000 registered voters. Of the 11 municipalities and two city corporations holding elections in the nation, Sreepur is the sixth largest. And in 2007, the National Election Commission kicked off its successful voter registration drive in Sreepur. NGOs and local officials agreed that Sreepur had been calm and that there were few hitches in the preparations for the upcoming election. An NGO involved in voter education told us there was a high level of awareness among voters and reported it was free to conduct its work, except for long standing suspicion from political parties. According to the local District Commissioner, the senior government official, political parties appear to have been following the election code of conduct. There was no talk of bribery, corruption or voter intimidation. All sides report they expect the process to go smoothly.

LITTLE PARTISANSHIP, ALL POLITICS IS LOCAL
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4. (U) PolOff spoke with the incumbent mayor, from the Awami League (AL), and his chief opponent, from the Bangladesh National Party (BNP). Though the candidates openly stated their party affiliations, neither referenced their party's national platform in their campaigns, preferring instead to run on local issues. Both men also utilized their own symbols (an umbrella and a pineapple respectively), rather than that of the AL and BNP in election materials. The BNP candidate even stated that although he is a BNP man, the party did not represent his identity. There was a consensus that campaigns in Sreepur were based on personalities and local issues related to development like improving sanitation, roads, providing electricity and building more schools.

COMMENT
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5. (SBU) Sreepur is on track for the August 4 elections. The focus on local issues appears to be making politicians more responsive to those they represent.
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